May 2018

The Fulton County Farm Bureau Young Leader Committee sponsored the “Faces of Ag” promotion on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Facebook page during March of 2018. The intent of the Committee was to spotlight a farmer, farm family, or individual involved in the agriculture industry each day during March, expanding the promotion and celebration of “Ag Day” each day of March!

We thought the entire set of stories was too good to “let go”; so we had a book published for each of the 31 “faces” to keep. These profiles spotlight the diversity, dedication, and passion local individuals have for our agricultural industry. Importantly, some of the stories also discuss changes, and sometimes the difficulties, that have been made to farm operations over the course of their farming careers.

“Thank You” to all of the individuals and families that we featured during the campaign. It was an honor (and it was fun) to interview these folks, and to hear and share their stories. We met some new people and learned some things about old friends! What became evident over the course of the month, was the true passion that all of these people we profiled feel for their chosen profession. They love what they do. They feel a duty to do the best job possible for others (their family members, their customers, and even society). Not a single one of them said they wished they were doing something else with their lives.

Most of them mentioned the importance of their Faith and their families; their desire to improve and advance, their determination to make their enterprise successful (and the wisdom to make a change when it wasn't working), their encouragement of young people to enter their field, and the high value they place on the work ethic they learned growing up on and/or working on a farm. They ALL exhibited their humble nature (we know it’s hard for farmers to talk about themselves!), their love of the land and animals, and their quiet dignity.

“Thank You” to all of the Facebook followers and readers that made the program so rewarding! If you think farming is just corn, beans, and cows, think again. Farms come in all types and sizes. These stories are a reminder of the hard-working and dedicated people who have had to adapt to a changing landscape and will face future challenges as changes continue.

The goals of our campaign were to spotlight the diversity of farm operations, the changes seen in farming over the course of the years, and the many occupations that are supported by our farmers and the ag industry. It also provided the perfect opportunity to truly put a “face” on all of those working in our agriculture industry.

We hope you have enjoyed following the “Faces” as much as we enjoyed spotlighting them! There’s some mis-information about farming and agriculture out there today, especially in the social media world. To those of you who are not connected to farming directly, we ask you to think about the folks we have profiled when reading a story or hearing a report that seems a “little out there”. We encourage you to question what you are reading or hearing and take some time to visit with a farmer about what the truth is.
We are Kyle and Cassi McCarthy of rural Lewistown. We are the parents of Averi (3 years old) and Harrison (1 year old). I graduated from Havana High School in 2008; OSF SFMC College of Nursing 2012 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing; and from University of Cincinnati 2016 MSN. I am a Nurse Practitioner with Graham Medical Group. Cassie is also a nurse, obtaining a BSN from OSF Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing in 2011 after graduating from Lewistown High School.

I became a beekeeper, the science of Apiculture, in 2015. I originally became interested in apiculture when we moved to the country. I researched various backyard hobbies, and thought bee-keeping was a good fit.

We have approximately 60 honey bee hives. Currently we’re focusing on liquid honey production through retail outlets primarily, with plans for the addition of sale of bees and beeswax products in the future.

Someone interested in becoming a beekeeper would need to take some beginner classes, do a lot of research, practice their methods, and should consider expansion of their operation.

Beekeeping is fascinating and rewarding but it can be difficult. Bees continue to face many challenges. Honey bees provide minor commercial benefits to agriculture here in the Midwest. They are essential, however, to the growing of many other agricultural products in the United States, including nuts, blueberries, cherries, apples, cranberries, and many more products.
I’m Darla Gentle of rural Fairview. I graduated from Industry High School and attended Spoon River College. I married Larry and farmed fulltime with him until 2005. At that time I started working at Fairview Ag, where I still am and I help with chores and fieldwork when I can.

Larry and I have two sons. Ryan is married to Stefanie and he’s worked for Pioneer for 17 years. They have a daughter (Gracelyn). Lance is married to Robyn and they own and operate Gentle Seed Sales, a Pioneer Agency. They have three children; Caleb, Colby, and Chelby.

We are active members of Wesley United Methodist Church in Canton. I serve on the fellowship committee and the Lambs of God daycare Board. In my spare time, I enjoy being with my grandkids, cooking, baking, reading, and boating. I served for six years on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board of Directors.

Larry and I started farming together in 1975 and over the years we have had almost every type of livestock imaginable. We have always planted soybeans and corn and raised seed corn for several years. We now have cattle, corn and soybeans, and the entire Gentle family are proud Farm Bureau members! We are a family owned and operated farm. In addition to crops, Larry has cows that have calves in the spring, and he backgrounds calves until late fall, then sells them. Ryan and Lance come to help load and haul the calves to the Fairview Sale Barn.

To a young person wanting to get into farming today, I would definitely recommend going to college to get an associate’s degree, or if possible a bachelor’s degree. There are so many facets of modern agriculture and if that is what your passion is, educating yourself before you start your career is vital.

Larry and I both grew up in farm families, and our whole family works in agriculture, so it really is our life as well as our occupation. Our family likes to remind all non farmers that “if you eat, you’re involved in agriculture too”!
We are Jim and Sally Lock, and we live in northern Fulton County near Avon. This is the same farm that my (Jim) parents started farming in 1946. As a little kid I always wanted to be a farmer. Dad didn’t have enough acres to include me, so I studied Ag Economics at the University of Illinois, thinking of a different career. While I was in college, a retiring farmer came to me and asked if I was interested in farming. He wanted to help me get started.

I jumped at the chance. My dad and I shared labor and equipment and kept separate operations. I started by renting 480 acres. Over the years I have had calf/cow herds and custom fed dairy heifers. After college I met and married Sally. She grew up in Champaign and loves our farm life together. We have 4 children (all Illini graduates with off-farm jobs) and 2 grandsons. Sally recently retired from her Speech-Language Pathologist’s role and continues to help with farm records and tractor driving.

I have volunteered as an EMT for 20 years, an Avon School Board member for 10 and on Fulton County Farm Bureau committees. We attend Checkrow Community Church, where we teach, sing and help as needed. In my spare time I love to read about WWII history since my dad served in northern Europe.

Farming has incredible challenges and blessings. I have been able to triple the size of our farm operation. We try to get it done with only part-time seasonal help. Every day I think about how I could prepare one of our children to return to the farm. My advice to them or any young farmer: Be fully committed. Think ahead at all times. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Learn and move on! I love my job. Every individual needs to be fed and we are providing that food. We do have exactly the same fears and concerns about our food and our world as any non-farmer. We read as much as we can, study and make tough decisions about GMOs, water quality, farm chemicals and a pipeline on our property. It’s a huge responsibility and privilege to do this work and be a steward of God’s creation.
I’m Leighton Rector and I farm near Vermont, Illinois. My wife Amber is a Physician’s Assistant. We have two daughters; Adahlyn (aged 4) and Lily (aged 2). We attend the Crossing Church in Macomb and I enjoy exercising, playing basketball, and deer hunting. I serve on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, where I am Building Services Chair.

I graduated from VIT High School, attended Spoon River College, and graduated from Southern Illinois University (Carbondale). I farm with my Dad, Grandpa, and brother. We have around 3500 acres.

We pride ourselves on feeding the world, while taking care of the land that God has given us to work with. We have an average size farm for this area. That farm has to support 4 families, so we try to be as efficient as we can and get the most out of what we grow.

To prepare a young person to start farming, I would recommend they find a farm to help on or work for a farmer, and try to learn as much as possible from the older generation of farmers. There is a lot of knowledge and wisdom to be found in our former farmers who are now retired.

I truly feel passionate about livelihood of farming that I have chosen; farmers really do feed the world!! Without farmers, no one eats.
I'm Greg Leigh from Marietta. I started farming in 1966 after graduating from the University of Illinois and serving two years as an officer in the U.S. Army, most of my time spent in Germany. Nancy and I married after meeting at the University of Illinois. While I have farmed, Nancy in the meantime earned master's degrees in Chemistry and Math, and provided that ever important off farm job with benefits by teaching at Western Illinois University and at Spoon River College.

Our three children all graduated from the U of I in Agriculture. They are Edward (Christine), an Engineer and business executive in Chicago, Katie (Colby), a freelance journalist and Kayak guide in Key West Florida and Randall (Jody) here at home. I am especially proud of my 5 grandchildren age 3 to 9.

I started farming on 240 acres that belonged to my Dad. I started raising sows and farrowing baby pigs on pasture just like my dad had done. After building temporary fence every year, stoking coal fired tank heaters and hauling feed in the mud, I decided to move towards confinement buildings. The 70's were pretty good years, so I had all hogs in confinement fairly quickly. My only tractor at first was a 1952 Super “M” my dad had owned. I hooked it in tandem with another one and pulled a 5 bottom plow. It is amazing to look back at how much things have changed. The tillage, the machinery, the hogs, the hybrids, the required labor are totally different.

My off farm activities seem to be grouped into approximate decades. I went on the Fulton Farm Bureau Board in 1971 and served 4 years as a board member, then 5 years as president. In the 1980's I served on the Spoon River College board of Trustees. I then went on the Spoon River FS board, later merged into Riverland FS, and now West Central FS. While on that board I served on the Alpha FS feed manufacturing co-op board. I just retired from the Spoon River Electric Co-Op board and the Fulton County Sheriffs Merit commission. Along the way, I was an actor at the Macomb Community theatre, went on a mission trip to Cuba, served on a statewide Farm Bureau action team, Co-Op relations committee, and 2011 State Resolutions committee.

Retire from farming? Not quite yet. I have the ideal situation. My son Randall came home to farm with me in 2000 after graduation from the University of Illinois, I taught him all I knew, and now he knows more than I do! There was no need for a sudden shift in management. He has gradually assumed responsibility for the operation. I have continued to keep the books on the computer mainly because I like to do it, and it keeps me in the loop. I help out on the farm by doing field work and making repairs when I'm needed. My main duty is to run the combine in the fall. Randall still confers with me regularly and even takes my advice once in a while.

One of the major decisions Randall has made was to change from the farrow to finish operation that I developed over the years to custom feeding of hogs for Tri Oaks foods. That has proved to be a good decision. We were able to utilize most of our old buildings, and built one new 1250 head building. All the hogs on the farm at any given time are the same age and origin. This really helps control disease. We have adopted precise control of manure application. GPS guidance helps us with that and with field work for both tractors and combine. I incorporated the farm in the 1970's. That has been a very helpful tool in transitioning Randall into ownership. We have both bought additional land and gradually expanded the operation. It is a moderate sized operation. We farm about 1100 acres, and finish about 6000 hogs per year.
Greetings! My name is Amanda Flessner and my husband and I are the veterinarians and owners of Oakdale Veterinary Center in Canton. I completed both my undergraduate and veterinary schooling at Iowa State University. Upon graduation of veterinary school, I completed a one-year internship at an equine-only referral hospital in Oakdale, California. During the internship I gained a lot of experience and saw a large caseload of horses which has helped me immensely as a practitioner. After the internship my husband and I stayed in California for the next year and worked at a busy small animal practice. With the untimely passing of Dr. Terry Coonradt (Northview Animal Hospital), we moved to Canton and took over his practice in August of 2013.

Oakdale Veterinary Center is a mixed animal practice servicing mostly dogs, cats, and horses. We offer surgical services, general care, assisted reproductive services, diagnostic imaging, dental care, and emergency services for both small and large animals. We also offer on-farm equine services. Professionally, I have a passion for ophthalmology (eyes) in all species so we also offer some more advanced ophthalmic diagnostics and procedures. Outside of work I enjoy being active outdoors (hiking, flower gardening, kayaking, and doing anything in the sun), reading/learning new information, and teaching others. Therefore, I feel like the veterinary field is a good fit for me because a good portion of my days are spent doing many of the extra-curricular things I enjoy.

To become a veterinarian, most people complete 4 years of undergraduate college coursework to obtain a bachelor's degree and then apply for acceptance to veterinary school. However, there are only 60 hours of required undergraduate credits necessary to apply to veterinary school, so some people elect to apply without a degree. Veterinary school is then an additional 4 years of in-class and hands-on coursework. Upon graduation of veterinary school, one can go into general practice or choose to go on for further and/or more specialized training that starts with an internship and can lead into a residency program, just like a human physician. There are several specialty fields of veterinary medicine that take an additional 3-4 years of training to obtain “diplomate” or specialist status. These fields include ophthalmology (eyes), surgery (large and small animal options), internal medicine (large and small animal options), radiology (x-rays, ultrasound, CT, MRI), dentistry (small and large animal options), anesthesia, dermatology, theriogenology (reproduction), behavior, and several others.

Advice I would offer to anyone interested in becoming a veterinarian would be to spend time around animals observing and learning normal behavior and conditions as well as body language. I would also recommend volunteering or shadowing at a clinic to see some of the practices and procedures that veterinarians perform. Contrary to popular belief, veterinary medicine is very much a “people” career so those of you who do not want to have to deal with the public should not consider this as a career path. As a veterinarian, we have to interpret animal behaviors and signs then communicate with the owners about the suspected diagnosis, treatment options, and possible outcomes. Many times trying to effectively manage client expectations is more work than actually working on the animal patient.

Since most of the patients we see would be considered companion animals and not food-producing animals, I may not be directly considered part of the agricultural industry. Regardless, I enjoy this field because it is a fun cross between being a detective like Sherlock Holmes and trying to fix things like a mechanic. As a detective we take clues from the owner’s history, know what is normal/abnormal, and then assess the animal to see if we can find any abnormalities that may lead us down the path to figuring out what is wrong. Once a diagnosis is reached, we have to know how the body systems work as well as how the medications/treatments interact with the body to stop the disease process to help the animal. Sometimes medications that are safe for one species may be toxic and/or fatal to another, therefore, there are many things to keep straight. Though our patients cannot talk to us is a big limitation in figuring out what is wrong, many times it is more rewarding and better because the animal does not lie and will be quick to “tell” you if you are right or wrong based on how they respond to treatment. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about veterinary medicine, Oakdale Veterinary Center, and me!
Hi! I’m John Lock. I am currently a senior at Spoon River Valley. I plan on going to Black Hawk East college this Fall, then transferring to Iowa State University to major in Ag Technology and minor in Agronomy.

My dad (Ken Lock) owns a farm where I help him all the time. We are a crop farm, with around 900 acres. I also show pigs in the summer time. I work at a cattle feedlot for Jake Fidler, at his salebarn in Fairview.

I am involved in 4-H and FFA. I am the Spoon River Valley FFA chapter vice president and the Section 12 FFA Sentinel. I am also a volunteer firefighter with the Fairview Fire Protection District.

To prepare someone for working on a farm, I’d tell them to prepare to work their butt off! Agriculture has always been a passion of mine. Since day 1 growing up on the family farm I have loved it. I have never found more helpful, nice people throughout my life than those in the farming community. I want to do everything I can to make agriculture better.
I’m Wes Carithers. My wife Stephanie and I own and operate Orchard Hill Farm & Country Store outside of Lewistown. We are open mid-July through October, when we sell apples, peaches, jams/jellies, baked goods, cider, wine, and many other products.

Stephanie is also an Occupational Therapist and I also run a landscaping and construction company (Carithers Inc) in my “off time”. We have four children; Casey-10, Brayden-9, Nikita-5, and Cole-2. I graduated from Astoria High School, and then from Spoon River College with an Ag Business Management degree.

We also raise a few calves every year at our home near Astoria, and we grow berries & vegetables on about 1 acre, as well as corn and beans on 46 acres. I make decisions on our farm, and pay Brian Lehman to farm the row-crop acreage! Our Apple and Peach trees comprise 18 acres. My hobbies are hunting, fishing, and woodworking. I volunteer with the Lions Club.

We purchased the orchard in 2016, but it was first established in 1933. We decided to buy the orchard because it’s something I’ve always been interested in, and I wanted to make some changes to make me happier with work. The way I figure it, if you are going to work most of your life, it better be at something you enjoy. It took a lot of discussion to convince my wife and there’s no way it would have worked without her support. It also would not have worked without the help of financing from the Farm Service Agency and local banks.

Running an orchard takes lots of on the job training. I recommend a young person take Ag/Vocational classes, and to do this you have to like working in the outdoors.

I think it’s a little early to tell if our kids will have any interest in the business, but I’m hoping at least one or two will like part of it. My 2 year old is always wanting to be outside and help with his tools. I can’t imagine myself not working outside and caring for trees and plants. It’s engrained in my brain. Technology and practices may have changed, but it still comes down to planting seeds and trees and wanting them to grow and produce something for us. The challenge today is figuring out how to do that more efficiently, in a less labor-intensive way. We strive to be good for the environment using the tools and technology available to us, without going bankrupt!
Hello from Farmington. My name is Colin Campbell and my wife Caty and our two children Sawyer and Finn live on a farm in north east Fulton county. We feel fortunate to live in this area and are very proud to be part of this farming community.

I am a graduate of Farmington High School, Spoon River College, Montana State University and Illinois Central College. Caty Graduated from Spoon River Valley High School and Montana State University. After graduating from MSU in 2008 Caty and I moved to Freemont, Nebraska where we worked on a feedlot through the summer to complete an internship for my MSU degree. After that we moved home, and Caty accepted an accounting position with a firm in Peoria while I attended the Diesel-Powered Equipment Technology Program at ICC.

After completing the Diesel Program, I accepted a job with the Deere dealership in Macomb. Two years later I was able to move to the Brimfield Deere dealership where I stayed for the next five years. This past summer I had an opportunity to move into teaching at ICC in the Diesel Program. I have had a lot of fun connecting with the students and like being able to teach technical information and share some of my experiences as well.

The thing I enjoy the most about farming is the sense of community. People in our area really look out for each other and when someone is in need it doesn’t take long for help to arrive. We also realize that it takes a team to make our individual farms work well. From agronomic information to machinery support to grain elevators and sale barns, it all takes a community of people working together to help each other out and make our farms as productive as possible.

I know I wouldn’t have gotten very far without a lot of knowledge, patience and help from so many great people in our area. Junior Schleich taught me how to mow hay. Bob Vohland taught me how to run a combine. Bill Slack taught me how to care for hogs. Randy Kingdon taught me how to treat people. Others have just been great role models for me to look up to like Barry Fisher, Bill Vohland, Fred Schleich and Roberta Tarochione. There are so many more that I can’t even think of at the moment but they have all meant an awful lot to me and I hope I can pass some of this knowledge on to my students as well.

I’d like to encourage any young people that have an interest in agriculture to get involved and you will find that there are many people who are willing to help you achieve your goals, too.
Hi! My name is Thaddeus. No, I’m not a farmer yet, but my mom is a farmer’s daughter and my Grammy and Grampy are farmers in Fulton County near Fairview. Mommy is Emily Schleich and Grampy and Grammy are Kent and Wendy Schleich.

Grampy Kent took me out to see my first cow the other day and there was a baby calf with her. The baby did not know what to think of me and I did not know what to think of it. I’m gonna be 1 year old soon, so there isn’t much farming I can do yet, but Grampy farms corn, soybeans, hay and raises Angus cattle.

He tells me that when I’m old enough I can farm, too and I can’t wait. Right now, though, I should just concentrate on walking and talking. I like farmers though. They produce lots of food so that my friends and I don’t have to worry about being hungry.

Mommy takes me to church at Northwoods Community Church in Canton and I love the nursery ladies there. They think I’m cute! But back to farming...I get a little distracted...Grampy hopes I will become a farmer too because it is a good way of life, raising food for the world and I think Grampy Kent is always right.
I am Dan Williams from Smithfield. My wife Nancy and I have two children; Vanessa is a Junior at SIU-Carbondale, majoring in Agriculture Education and minoring in Animal Science. Daniel is a freshman at Spoon River College in the Diesel Tech program. Nancy is Family and Consumer Science teacher at both Lewistown High School and VIT High School.

I graduated from Bushell Prairie High School and Spoon River College. Nancy is from southern Illinois. We met through her job at the U of I Extension office when she was hired as the Home Economics/4-H Advisor at the office in Lewistown.

We are members of the Bushnell United Methodist Church. I volunteer with the Bushnell Prairie City FFA Alumni, am a Harris Township Trustee, and enjoy old cars and tractors.

We are a family-owned farm. Daniel works on the farm, but we do have a part-time employee. His name is Don Dahmm. He has worked on our farm for almost 16 years. We raise corn, soybeans, and wheat on 600 acres. We also raise hogs. I have a farrow to finish operation, averaging between 40 and 50 sows at any time. We are one of the few farrow to finish hog farms left in Fulton County. I have stayed in the hog business because I really enjoy the work, but it’s not for everyone!

Raising hogs farrow to finish is a highly labor intensive job. A young person wanting to raise hogs should work for a hog farmer, and gain as much practical experience as they can. I take pride in the hogs we raise, in the wholesome food that we give them, and in the high quality meat we provide for consumers to eat!
March 12

I’m Faron Reynolds from rural Lewistown (near Little America). My wife Heather and I have two sons; five year old Griffin and one-year old Emmett.

Heather works for the American Red Cross and I am a Certified Crop Specialist at Fulton FS.

I graduated from VIT High School and attended Spoon River College in Canton. I graduated from Western Illinois University with a degree in Ag. Science. I minored in Ag. Economics.

When I’m not working I enjoy hunting, fishing and spending time with my family.

My job requires me to take continuing education courses and workshops in both the summer and winter. These cover new regulations, new products or new uses of products, and disease education that I might have to get better educated on. I work with farmers throughout the growing season, and in the off-season, to help them produce the best crop they can, and have the most profitable farm they can have.

To be in this field, a young person needs to take agronomy courses, and internships are also helpful. Mine included internships with a joint business venture of Fulton FS and what was Schuyler-Brown FS, then with Growmark, and my final one was with the existing Fulton FS company as it is now.

I grew up on a farm. My Dad, Grandpas and Uncles all farm. Farming is all I thought I’d ever do, but there wasn’t enough farm for me to come back to. This job has allowed me to be involved in farming anyway and I’m really happy with what I do.
I am Joe Tolley from Avon. I grew up on a farm with my two brothers. I graduated from Avon High School and the University of Illinois. I majored in Technical Systems Management and came home to farm with my parents after graduating in 2010.

I married Jenna in 2017. She is a nurse at St. Mary’s in Galesburg.

Our farm is located near Ellisville. We raise corn, soybeans, and hay on about 2000 acres and have a 180 cow/calf herd. JC Staggs is also an integral part of our farm as an employee.

We attend Northwoods Church in Galesburg. I’ve been active in Young Leaders since high school, and have served on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board of Directors since 2012. I am involved in the Avon Lions Club.

Along with farming, I enjoy watching and following my favorite sports teams; Chicago Bears, St. Louis Cardinals, and Fighting Illini Football and Basketball. I also enjoy spending time with friends and grilling out.

When I came back to the farm, college classes provided some useful tips and information, but I’ve really learned more lessons actually farming than I did in class! The agriculture industry is all I’ve ever known. I grew up always wanting to be a farmer, and am lucky I had the opportunity to do it. My family cares very much about the well-being of our animals and the safety of the food supply that we produce.
March 14

I am Rachel Skien of rural Table Grove. I graduated from Havana High School in 2006, received my Associates Degree in Science from Spoon River College in 2008, and Majored in Ag Science with an emphasis in Agricultural Education and Minored in Animal Science from Western Illinois University in 2011.

While attending Spoon River College, I met Jeremy Skien who became my husband in 2011. He graduated from Bushnell Prairie City in 2007, received his Associates Degree in Science from Spoon River College in 2009, and graduated from Western Illinois University in 2011, majoring in Ag Science with an emphasis in Agronomy and minoring in Plant Breeding. He is currently a Custom Applicator and Certified Crop Advisor for West Central FS.

We have a beautiful little boy named Jace who is 17 months old. We enjoy spending time with friends and family, hunting, fishing, and riding our horses.

I am the Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor for the V.I.T. School District. Being an Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor is a very busy and fun job! I love teaching students about all aspects of agriculture from where their food comes from, to different shop skills, and all the opportunities they have in the ag industry. Being an FFA Advisor is one of my passions. The FFA organization allows me to utilize its resources and pass on the knowledge and life skills that will help my FFA members excel in their future careers. This is done by taking students to Leadership Conferences, State and National Conventions, Camps, Career Development Events and ag related tours.

My advice to someone interested in becoming an Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor would be to start by having passion for the field of agriculture. This is important, as you will be molding and guiding your students in the direction they want to travel in the future of agriculture. You will also need to attend a university with an Agricultural Education Program. During your years in college, I recommend that you diversify your education by job shadowing several teachers in different Ag programs as well as attend leadership workshops and Ag teacher conferences. This is a great way to learn from current teachers and utilize what has worked for them in the classroom.
My name is Tara Ricker. My husband Charlie, our son Cole, and I live on his family’s farm in rural Lewistown. Charlie and I grew up showing horses in the same 4-H club. Charlie learned about all the hard work that goes into farming while helping his parents grow corn, soybeans, and hay and raise various types of livestock. A portion of the crops help to feed livestock they have kept here at Ricker Farms over the years. Unlike my husband, I was not raised on a farm. My grandparents had a small farm where I kept my horses, and that was where I truly felt at home. In high school we were both active FFA members. Charlie graduated Cuba High School in 2003. I graduated from Canton High School in 2004 then Spoon River College in 2007.

In 2005 we got married and with a ton of help from family and friends, we built our own home on his family’s farm. Shortly thereafter, Charlie started as an Ag Mechanic at Fliginger Equipment in Trivoli and I worked for a while at ADM in Havana grading grain. In 2007, we welcomed our son Cole to the family. It’s wonderful to see the next generation making memories on the family farm. Charlie is currently a machine repairman at Caterpillar. Aside from his full-time job he maintains, fixes, and keeps the farm equipment in working condition. A few years ago, Charlie bought and raised a few piglets to feed our family and close friends. This year we will be raising piglets born on the farm. Charlie’s free time is spent on dirt bikes, 4 wheelers, and motorcycles. My main focus for the last several years has been upkeep of the farm and building a homestead on the patch of ground that I call home. As a farmhand, I continue to learn and take on responsibilities. In my free time I enjoy riding horses, gardening, sewing, line dancing, and helping pets and wildlife in need.

Charlie and I casually call our acre Within Walking Distance Homestead. We still have some of the same horses we took to shows. In addition to them and the pigs, we also have a small herd of goats. They bless us with a few fainting goat and fainter/pygmy cross kids each year. Though they are meat goats, thankfully the baby goats go to great new homes where they are very well-loved pets. A mixed variety flock of poultry free range the farm. My personal favorite are the turkeys. Cole and I volunteered two of them to go to Dickson Mounds with us and teach kids about turkeys around Thanksgiving last year for their Tot Time program. Eggs from all the birds are generally collected and enjoyed by ourselves or shared with others. Some eggs are left with a hen to hatch.

Cole is a Fulton County 4-H member where he enjoys participating in Shooting Sports and showing his animals. Last year he took a chicken, a goose, and one of our goats to the local fair. This year he has gotten quite ambitious and plans to show additional poultry, both meat and dairy goats, and possibly our calf. He also enjoys hunting, fishing, flintknapping, riding his 4-wheeler, and caring for his pair of flying roller pigeons which he hopes to raise young from in the future. We are excited to see what this year brings.

Farming is not a career a person goes into for the hours, pay, glamour, or vacation time. It’s a lifestyle. A lifestyle where the to-do list never gets shorter, your plans constantly change with the weather, the tool you need is always the one missing, and if something is going to break you can bet it’s going to be in the field farthest from home. You find yourself constantly working, not only because there’s always something that needs attention, but also because you love it. I cannot think of a more rewarding way of life.
I am Craig McCoy from Lewistown. I grew up on a farm and graduated from Lewistown High School, where I was involved in FFA and 4-H. My wife Rachelle is a Psychiatric Nurse. She is from Indiana and we met when she was a student at Olivet University.

We are the parents of three children. Christine is a teacher in the Canton School District, Matthew is a senior at Western Illinois University, and Meagan is at Spoon River College.

I farm a couple hundred acres, have some cattle, and we raise show pigs (“M & M Show Pigs”). At one time in the 1980’s, I had a sow herd of 60 sows, but as my buildings and facilities aged, I chose to reduce my operation instead of taking on the expense of new buildings. I was also selling Kent Feed around that time, and after doing that 13 years I got out of that, mainly because everyone else was getting out of hogs too!

In 1999 I started working for Hummel Excavating, and bought that business in 2009. Now McCoy Excavating, we do dry dams, ponds, tree removal, and field tiling for farmers. Tiling a farm field is done to improve the drainage pattern of the field. It helps to remove excess water, which allows farmers to get into the field earlier, but it also helps the crops grow better by developing their root structure. I am pleased that Matthew plans to come back to work with me after he graduates.

We are members of the Lewistown Church of the Nazarene, where I serve on the Church Board. I’m also President of the Fulton County Fair and Racing Association Board (“Fair Board”). In my spare time, I take part in my family’s hobby of Bluegrass Music, and I help out my Mom and Dad (Marcia and Art Jones) at Marigold Meadows. About 15 years ago, they started doing homesteading demonstrations on their farm. During the two weekends of the Spoon River Scenic Drive each Fall, my parents host 4000 – 5000 visitors to their “mini-homestead” farm, showing them how farming was done with Percheron and Belgian Draft horses. Our family makes about 90 pies a day in a wood fired oven on those two weekends.

My passion for agriculture has kind of overflowed into my involvement with the County Fair. I want to better-educate non agriculture people about what ag is really about. We’re also doing some research with area universities about how to get more people to come to the fair; to find out what will bring them out. I want people to know how their food gets to them before they buy it in the grocery store. I want them to know that the food served to them on the table doesn’t just come from a can; I want them to know where it originates, how it’s raised, processed, and distributed to get to them so they can consume it, and enjoy it.
Hi! My name is Scott Cripe from Lewistown and I'm a grain originator for Western Grain Marketing, LLC based in Havana. My wife Amanda & I have 3 kids, Lydia (15), Charlie (12), & Adah (10). Amanda is a Special Education Early Childhood teacher with the Canton School District at Westview School. I enjoy hunting & fishing in what spare time I have, as our children keep us EXTREMELY busy with their extra-curricular activities! You can always find us on a bleacher somewhere in the area watching our kid’s sporting activities.

I graduated from Astoria High School and then attended Western Illinois University where I graduated with a BS in Agriculture Economics. With no real farming background you may ask how I got interested in Agriculture. There were 2 things that drove this decision:

First, my maternal grandfather, Charlie Lebkuecher had a small grain & livestock farm outside of Beardstown. I always remembered spending weekends with him and doing what farmers do. I was fascinated about all aspects of his operation, whether it was spending time at the old Bluff Springs Farmer's Elevator, checking the cows out in the pasture, and of course feeding the fish in his farm pond “up in the hills” as he called it!

Second, like many incoming freshman attending college, I hadn’t declared a major and ended up taking an Intro Ag Econ class. I really enjoyed that class and during my sophomore year I was introduced to Dr. Tom Drinka in Ag Econ 233. After that class, I knew what my major was going to be and the rest was history!

Early in my career, I worked for Schuyler-Brown FS in Rushville, Spoon River FS in Fiatt/Rapatee (which became Riverland FS through a merger), Ag Land FS in Green Valley, & ADM in Havana. All in all, I’m in my 19th year of my career originating grain all in this area. My favorite part of my job is building all the relationships and trust with the producers in the area. No day is ever the same as the last!
I’m Emily Smith. I graduated from Lewistown High School in 2012, attended Black Hawk East and then transferred to Western Illinois University and received my degree in Animal Science, with a minor in Ag Business in December 2016. For the past year I have been working for Carthage Veterinary Service Ltd. managing one of their boar stud farms.

When I’m not working, I like reading, cooking, and spending time with family and friends.

I currently don’t live on a farm, but I grew up one. I have been surrounded by agriculture ever since. Growing up I participated in 4H and FFA, so it made my decision pretty easy about staying in the Ag industry.

I would tell kids interested in going into ag to get involved by getting internships, or summer jobs, or volunteering. In order to prepare for any type of job within the agriculture industry, whether it is dealing with animals or crops, your job is made much easier by experience. Those experiences will help you decide which part of the agriculture industry you want to be involved in.

Today, more and more people do not know where their food is raised and comes from and what it takes for that food to end up on their table. It comes from a lack of education. Those who have questions, I tell them to ask a farmer and do some research. Today, agriculture is constantly changing to be able to feed the world. There is less land and producers than before. Farmers wouldn’t consume or feed their own families the products and animals they are raising if it wasn’t safe.
I’m Kim Azbell from Vermont. I have one child, a son, Brandon who is married to Kristin. Brandon is an engineer for Texas Instruments and now works with customers of TI and design team members rather than chips and software. I have three grandkids: Lauren who works as an event planner for a company in the Chicago area; Nick who is a Junior in college majoring in business; and Michael who is a freshman in high school.

I Graduated from VIT high school in 1970 and from Western Illinois University in 1974 with a B.S. in physics. While my career path hasn’t been in scientific research the way I thought it might be, the disciplines learned are more relevant than ever in this ever-changing and challenging field of agriculture.

I began helping my grandpa on his farm when I was in Jr-High. I spent every summer all through high school walking beans, baling hay, working with livestock, cutting wheat, doing machinery repair, and all the other activities that a farm demands. Actually, having the opportunity to farm on my own never entered my mind. By the time I graduated from WIU I was pretty sure I didn’t want to spend several more years in school pursuing advanced degrees and to be frank, Quantum Mechanics about killed me off! I continued to work at Bower Roller Bearing as I had during my senior year at WIU, when in late 1975 I was given the opportunity to begin farming my grandparents’ farm.

I’ve never looked back and consider farming to be my highest calling. It’s the only occupation I know that allows such a diverse work environment, be it heavy machine operator, mechanic, trucker, financial analyst, agronomist, welder, electrician, carpenter, designer….the list goes on and on. Every day is something new. One of the blessings I’ve experienced resulted from a conversation I had several years ago with a close neighbor. After some deliberation we decided to start farming together as a team, first with spring work and later on including harvest. Bob Marshall and I have been working together since 2002 and it’s been a terrific experience which allows each of us to bring our individual talents to bear for the benefit of both.

While I’m not currently active in any particular church, faith in God is a very important part of my life. While I don’t have any specific hobby, I have many interests. I enjoy mowing my yard and suffer from “lawn creep” where every year it gets a little bigger! When it’s too cold to do that, I like building things and working in my shop. I’m in the slow process of transitioning my “farm shop” into my “machine shop” and while still a novice at machining, I’m immensely enjoying learning the skills to transform a piece of metal into something useful.

Like so many other farmers around the country, I’ve served on church boards, the school board, and the Fulton County Farm Bureau board. Since the turn of the century, I’ve been a trustee for both the local fire protection district as well as our own Fulton County Emergency Medical Association. I hope in some small way that my efforts have been beneficial.

For someone thinking about going in to farming, I’d tell them; learn something everyday. Think critically. Examine the alternatives. Ask God for direction. Seek good advice and discern the good from the expedient. One of the adages I tell myself… if I’m talking, I’m not learning anything.

Agriculture is the oldest profession and may be the most noble. I’m proud of the job we do and the ways we continue to improve. As a final thought, whenever I ask for God’s blessing on a meal, I always thank God for the food, the hands that have prepared it, and the farmers that raised it. Farming is doing God’s work.
I'm Cassidy Barr from rural Lewistown. I am 17 years old and a senior at Lewistown High School. I have basically grown up on the farm of my Grandparents, Ray and Glenda Postin. My mom is Stacey Postin. In fact, we live across the road from them and some of the cattle are kept at our place. I have an older sister, Presley, who graduated from Western Illinois University with an agriculture degree. She came back to farm full time with Grandpa.

I've been active in 4-H (Jolly Workers for 8 years), FFA, student senate, FCCLA, S.W.A.T., Spanish club, archery and national honor society. I am currently the president for FFA, the secretary for future career and community leaders of America (FCCLA) and the secretary for student senate, also vice president for Spanish club.

I work on my Grandpa's farm on the weekends and when I'm not in school. I also do a lot of babysitting. When I have free time, I enjoy four-wheeler riding, fishing, and doing anything outdoors.

I am going to go to Spoon River College this fall, to start my study of nursing. I plan to obtain my RNBSN from Methodist after that. I started to think about nursing when my great grandma Roberta had a stroke. Before she passed away, I spent time with her, helping her while she was at the assisted living center. But I also thought about going into teaching; this year as part of one of my classes I have been mentoring pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students at Lewistown Elementary. I really formed a bond with some of them and found that I liked working with kids. I cherish every moment I'm with them. I decided ultimately to blend my two interests together; I'd like to work in pediatric nursing in Peoria, so that I can still be available to work on the farm, too.

When I was in 4-H I showed cattle. Raising and showing my animals, and working on the farm, taught me the value of hard work and responsibility, most of it taught to me by my Grandpa Ray. I think as much as I enjoyed showing, the time I spent with him learning and raising the animal was just as important. He's been a great role model and a great influence in my life; he's pretty much been more like a father to me than a grandfather.

For high school students who might be interested in agriculture, I'd tell them to become involved in FFA. Try all the events and programs and investigate all the careers available to you. FFA provides many opportunities that kids may not know about. Taking part in a contest or event may spark an interest that turns into a passion!
I am Kathy Butler from rural Lewistown. My husband John and I have two boys; Jared is married to Jamie (who works at the Farm Bureau office) and Ben is married to Justine (who works at Graham Medical Group). Both the boys work at Fulton FS. We have 5 grandkids that love to be on the farm.

John and I both graduated from Lewistown High School and grew up on farms. We married in 1979 and have farmed full time ever since. We raise corn, soybeans, and hay. We also have a small herd of Black Angus cows.

We are what I would consider “small” farmers, and we do everything ourselves. John’s brother Marc retired from Fulton FS a couple years ago, and now he helps in the fall and spring.

We attend Temple Baptist Church in Canton. When I’m not farming, I enjoy riding horses, reading, planting flowers, and mowing. I am a long-time 4-H volunteer and I’m President of the Mother’s and More HEA Unit, and I serve on the County HEA Board. In the past I’ve served on the FSA County Committee.

I take the place of the “hired man” on the farm. The things I do are drive the tractor, haul grain from the field and to the elevator, and work with the cows. All of my training has been “on the job training!”

Farming is a lot of hard work. It’s not just a 9 to 5 job. The cow doesn’t care if it’s 3:00 on a Sunday morning and it’s 10 degrees below zero. If she needs help calving, you have to be there. Likewise, you don’t just plant the seed and then wait until fall to harvest it. You have to decide which seed will grow best in which type of soil. You have to get it planted between rains. Then you have to hope it rains enough at the right time during the growing season but doesn’t rain too much!

After that you have to market the grain you are harvesting and get it all hauled to the river or storage bins, all while hoping you made all the right decisions. But farming is all John and I have ever wanted to do, so all the stress is worth it!
My name is Karen Messer. My husband, Matt, and I have a small hobby farm located in Little America, outside of Lewistown, IL. Together, with our three little girls, Kenna, Brynann, & Megan, we raise chickens, ducks, geese, guineas, peacocks, rabbits, & goats.

We started out living on a quiet street in Lewistown with a couple rabbits and two chickens. The following year, we expanded to a few more chickens, rabbits, & took on ducks. Last year we expanded even more into geese and other small farm animals. My daughter, Kenna, is a member of Fulton County 4-H. She shows her chickens, ducks, & geese at the Fulton County Fair, and earns money selling fresh vegetables that were grown in our garden.

In 2017, I applied to the USDA, and was approved for a license to sell our farm fresh eggs; then at the end of 2017, we purchased a larger property in Little America that would allow us room to grow & take on more types of animals. My husband converted a large garage into a chicken coop for me, and built all the nesting boxes & cages for our animals. We now have approximately 50+ chickens, 40+ ducks, 2 geese, 4 peacocks, 5 rabbits, 2 goats, & 4 guineas. We breed ducks, chickens, & rabbits, and have hatched numerous animals with our incubator.

We also now have the ability to place orders for certain breeds of birds, and have placed orders for others as well. We recently placed an order to start raising pheasants. We purchased a miniature pot belly pig & a miniature donkey, and are looking forward to raising animals for the kids to show at the fair again this year.

Becoming a small farm has been a learning process for us, full of trials & errors. We could not have made this transition without help from friends & family. Neither myself or Matt were raised on farms, although my dad owns a farm on Shelby Road. Matt had experience with chickens, and I raised rabbits as a kid. That was the extent of our farming experience until these last few years. Our ultimate goal is to turn our hobby farm into a successful & profitable farm with a variety of animals & crops. We learn a little more each year, and thoroughly enjoy the experience of raising our animals and sharing this journey with our children.
I’m Delson Wilcoxen. I am a 2003 graduate of VIT High School. I received an Associate degree in Ag Applied Science from Spoon River College in 2005, and my Bachelor’s Degree from Western Illinois University in Ag Science with a focus in Animal Science in 2008.

I own and operate a 30 head angus cow/calf operation. I custom bale hay with my uncle and I row crop 300 acres of corn, soybeans, hay ground. I also am the Beef Herd Manager at Western Illinois University, a job I’ve had for 7 years. WIU has a 75-80 head of cow/calf operation. As the manager of the herd, I also run a 75 head bull test every year. I’m a cattle nutrition and genetics advisor. When not working, I enjoy both watching and taking part in tractor pulls, and I enjoy fishing.

I have a passion for livestock and the care of animals. Having a strong customer relationship helps when dealing with producers for the bull sale. A young person interested in a similar job should be able to effectively communicate details of each animal to management. A degree in animal science and a few years of experience will set a person up well for my position. On a daily basis I deal with the public, feed rations, health inspections and overall general welfare of the animals. A young person should feel very comfortable answering any question on those topics to perform the job I do.

I enjoy the challenge the ag industry brings me each and every day. Not every day is the same and different situations arise that require a lot of critical thinking. While things may not always go well or be enjoyable, at the end of it all I find great satisfaction in working in the industry that I do.

Farmers are some of the most hardworking people in the country. We always make sure our families and animals are always well taken care of. We put them first above all else and we will do whatever it takes to keep them happy and healthy.
March 24

I'm Rick Bull. I farm near Liverpool with my son Ryan.

I grew up on the farm and my wife Darci and I live in the same house I grew up in. It's the same house my grandfather lived in, and my Dad grew up in. I graduated from Lewistown High School in 1979 and attended Spoon River College in Canton. I worked on our farm all through high school and college. About the time I was in college, my grandfather was ready to retire from the farm. Farming was all I ever wanted to do, so the timing was good.

My wife Darci and I went to high school together, but we didn't start dating until 1983 when she was home on spring break from Olivet University. We married in 1986. Darci is Chief Nursing Officer at Mason District Hospital. Darci and I took a trip to Europe this past summer, which was prompted by my interest in World War I and II history. I'm active in the Lewistown FFA Alumni, am a trustee on the East Liverpool Levy District, and am a Buckheart Fire District Trustee.

We are the parents of Rachel, who will graduate from pharmacy school this summer and return to Fulton County; and Ryan, who graduated from the University of Illinois in 2010 with a degree in Ag. Business. Ryan is married to Emily, a nurse at Graham medical group. (I've realized how important it is for our wives to have jobs that provide that all important insurance!) They are expecting our first grandchild in April. We've been told it's a girl, but the parents are keeping the name to themselves! Ryan is very athletic, staying in shape working out and taking part in endurance events, water sports, league basketball, and slow pitch softball. He coached Jr High boys' basketball for two years but had to step away from that when it became clear farming and chores didn't jell well with 3pm practice times most days of the week from November to February! He also finds time for his woodworking hobby.

Ryan is the 5th generation to work our farm. I thought it was pretty great when during his first year at the U of I he called to tell me he had decided that after college he would definitely be coming back to farm with me. About that time my Dad's health started to fail, so again the timing was right for a new family member to transition into our farm. My Dad (Richard) farmed as long as he could and passed away in 2015. My Mom (Marilyn) still keeps the books for our farm and does all the payroll.

We farm about 1500 acres of corn and soybeans and have a couple hundred acres of pasture. We raise 4500 head of cattle, all in Fulton County. We do artificial insemination and embryo transfer in our herd. We will have about 125 baby calves on the ground this Spring. We raise and feed out everything that is born on our farm. We market all our cattle through National Beef out of Dodge City, Kansas. When it's time to market the animals, we ship out a semi load a month. Then we get all of our carcass data back on the animals from National Beef, which is really helpful to us.

Farmers raising livestock really have to plan their lives around the animals. I hear so many myths from people that don't understand what we do every day. As a livestock farmer, I take every opportunity to let non farmers know what we do to care for our animals, and that our lives revolve around caring for these animals. And it's not just Ryan and me; it's our wives and families who have to realize that the plans we have for, say a Saturday night, may not happen because of something with the animals. But farming and raising livestock is all I ever wanted to do, and I'm glad that my son has made the decision to continue that tradition with his family now.
I’m Jake Fidler from Cuba. My wife Laura and I have been blessed with two amazing girls that share our love for cattle & agriculture; Addison – 10 and Alyssa – 9. We are 3rd generation owners of the Fairview Sale Barn. The sale barn has been our family business for the past 43 years.

I graduated from Cuba High School, and then from Western Illinois University, with a degree in Ag Business. Laura graduated from Otis High School (she grew up on a dairy farm in Colorado), then from McCook Community College & Western Illinois University, also with a degree in Ag Business. Many times I have said that Laura came to Illinois on a load of cattle from the West, but the truth is I snagged her during our very last semester at college.

In addition to the sale barn, we manage a commercial cow operation and own a backgrounding operation (backgrounding is a beef production system that involves maximal use of pasture and forages from the time calves are weaned until they are placed in a feedlot). We then retain ownership of these cattle after we send them to feedlots in Kansas and Nebraska. I’m also an auctioneer.

We are members of Fiatt Independent Christian Church in Fiatt. When we’re not working, we enjoy being outside, fishing, hunting, and watching sporting activities with the family. We’re also involved in showing cattle with the girls & talking about cattle (lol)!

At the sale barn we hold two regular sales a week. On Tuesdays we host a packer sale for fat cattle and cull cows/bull, Cattle ready to go to the packer. On Thursdays, we sell sheep, goats, and feeder cattle & a weekly hay sale. The largest single sale at Fairview Sale Barn was 2,775 head of feeder cattle. Our busiest months are November through April and we currently have a work family of around 23 employees.

Knowledge of livestock as a whole is absolutely necessary for success in my business. At the top of the list is to know the value of each individual breed and class. The only way to acquire this is to have an apprentice with someone who is good at the business or grow up in the business. Along with that you must also possess a strong work ethic, strong critical thinking skills, ability to monitoring animal health conditions and good bookkeeping (or marry a wife with strong bookkeeping skills).

As producers in the food chain to the top provider of protein in the world, this occupation is here to stay. As part of providing safe food, the livestock business is highly regulated by the government, and rightly so. Food safety is vital to the business and the level of consumer confidence in beef production affects the consumer’s eating habits. The future of our industry hinges on the consumer’s trust in we cattle farmers. At Fairview Sale Barn and our farm operation we educate our employees and certify them through the Illinois Beef Associations Beef Quality Assurance program for responsible, thoughtful cattle management at all levels of the animal handling process.

As the 3rd generation in the livestock auction company, I strongly believe that livestock auctions are a vital part of the livestock industry, serving producers and assuring a fair, competitive price. It is a wonderful experience to have a buyer and a seller and to bring them both together. We have a great customer base and we greatly value the relationships we have with our customers and consider many of them friends!
I’m Marianna Papadoulis and I’m your current Miss Fulton County Fair! I am 21 years old and a Senior at St. Francis College of Nursing. My parents are Pete and Chris Papadoulis. While most of my family has lived in the United States all our lives, my father, has lived here for only forty-one years. But he has retained his wonderful Greek accent!

My father grew up on a livestock farm in Greece. He decided to come to the United States for his education, and the opportunities here were unlike any he had in Greece. He came to the U.S.A to experience what was called “The American Dream”. He recently retired from a career with the FBI. My mother spent a majority of her life being a stay at home mom, but she is now a part-time substitute teacher for the Canton Union School District.

I plan to earn a bachelors degree in nursing from OSF St. Francis College of Nursing, and begin a career at the OSF Children’s Hospital in either the pediatric hematology/oncology unit, or the pediatric intermediate care unit (IMCU)/ pediatric intensive care unit (PICU).

Even though I didn’t grow up on a farm, and I don’t plan to work in the agricultural industry directly, I set a goal on becoming Fulton County Fair Queen last year to experience a new adventure. As I noted earlier, my father’s agricultural background is very important to him. This role as Fulton County Fair Queen provided me the opportunity to really look at the differences in the two country’s agricultural production systems.

The farms in Greece are typically much smaller than the farms we have here in Illinois. The animals there eat more grass and brush rather than corn. In other words, the animals in Greece are pasture fed. The meat consumption is mainly fresh versus frozen in Illinois. Greeks do not consume as much frozen meats as we do in Illinois. Beef is considered the most expensive product of the meats. Pork is the most widely consumed meat; followed close behind by lamb, beef and goat. The overall tastes of the meat in Greece have a more powerful flavor than the meat in Illinois. The usage of spices and marinating is rarely necessary, due to the meat having such a strong flavor as is. Typically, the terrain the livestock are raised on is not flat. The animals my family raise on the Island are raised on the side of a mountain! Livestock freely graze on the sides of the mountains. They are not fenced in. The goats in Greece are larger than the ones in Illinois, and the cows are smaller. Cow’s milk is used mostly for drinking purposes, while goat and sheep milk are used for a variety of cheeses, yogurts and butter. The meat markets hang their livestock in their shops by the feet, so that customers can see the meat before they purchase it. Many times, it is not refrigerated, which is surprisingly different from the way we Americans buy our meat!

I am provided with these learning opportunities. I’ve learned a great deal about American agriculture and it’s importance to our area in the past year. My role as Fair Queen is important because I am an advocate for agriculture. I have been put in a position to educate many individuals about agriculture. Many people are uneducated or falsely educated on agricultural related topics. That is where myself, and other County Fair Queens, come into play to make sure that people turn their focus towards the truth about agriculture. We must use our passion towards agriculture and spread that passion to as many people as we can. Each day as Miss Fulton County Fair I am provided with these learning opportunities constantly!

I knew that with or without a crown, the experience competing for Miss Fulton County Fair would help me in the future. I’m so thankful that God led me to believe that I was important enough to be a part of the Miss Fulton County Fair Queen Pageant, and important enough to be chosen for this role!
I'm Erik Kotewa. My wife Jamie is an art teacher substituting at Havana High School and we have 3 kids; Mallory, Declan, Connor.

While I am the owner of Hallowed Hops Farm, located south of Lewistown, my parents Larry and Julie, and brothers Caleb and Aaron have significant financial and time/labor effort put into the business. My father got back into farming in the mid 2000's as a hobby and to have an activity upon retirement. We started the hops farm in 2014 with a 2-acre trial plot to see how the hops grew in the soil.

Caleb and Larry did much of the planting work for the trial plot. The plants had aggressive vigor and produced hops the first year, so I looked into financing and put together a business plan. I was working full time as an economic developer for Champaign County Economic Development Corporation. So it was more a hobby for me at the time. It became more serious in 2016 when I had to make a choice about my profession, and I chose hops. So now I am full time on the hops yard; 10 acres. It is family run. Hop farms scrape by for the first 2-3 years while the plants mature, and the market develops. Brewers value hop quality before ingredient location. Great quality hops are already available from the Pacific Northwest, so breaking into the market requires trial by brewer and a willingness to change source; establishing a good reputation from scratch.

Hops are a fascinating plant. I enjoy working with plants and of course the end product (beer) is something I also enjoy in moderation. Hops are also used for perfume, some tea, and aromatherapy. The varieties of hops we grow are Centennial, Crystal, Cascade, Cluster, Chinook, Nugget, and Alpha Aroma.

The hops plant grows on a trellis, which is 20 feet tall. This makes maintenance an unusual aerial challenge. We have a telehandler and an elevated platform on wheels to string the yard. We get to tie 20,000 strings this year and train 40,000 vines. Training is helping the vines find the twine that it will grow up.

To harvest we need 3-4 people to run the picking trailer. We cut the whole vine out of the field, stack them on a trailer and take them to a stationary picker where the vines get fed through at 180 vines an hour. Picking by hand can take up to an hour per plant. After it is picked the hops get dried within 20 hours. Hops are picked at the peak of hop flower maturity when it is the most aromatic and alpha acids are peaking. They do not dry in the field like a grain. You are picking the flower(cone) reproductive part of the plant and it is roughly 80% water. So it gets dried in batches at 100°F for about 20 hours. Then it is processed into pellets for brewers to use. It is sold as pellets in nitrogen flushed mylar bags. Even the pellet mill is nitrogen flushed to prevent oxidation of the hops oils. Pellets are easier to use than whole cone for most breweries. The pellets must be freezer stored as heat, sun and oxygen are enemies. They can spoil in 3 months or sooner in ambient air.

The initial investment to start the farm was A LOT and it hasn't broken-even yet! The investment has been roughly $20,000/acre for 15 acres. I've now created a new business with another funder, Illinois Hops LLC. This new business will focus on hops processing and collaborating with other Illinois hops growers. I predict both businesses to be in the black by 2020.

We sell our hops direct to breweries. We partner with several breweries within 100 miles of us; Engrained Brewing in Springfield is using quite a bit. Buzz Bomb, Triptych, Industry Brewing and Bearded Owl in Peoria, Genesee Brewing, and Lot 51 in Paris are others. Hand of Fate in Petersburg is making the 1818 Illinois Bicentennial Beer with our hops. Destihl, Goose Island, and Half Acre are also brewing with our hops. The list keeps growing.

Brewers will use between 6oz and 3 pounds of hops per barrel of beer. Our yield in 2017 was 4,000 pounds and we are shooting for 10,000 in 2018 and 15,000 in 2019/20. Yield per acre can be between 1,200 and 2,000 pounds an acre. That is 1-2 pounds per plant.

We have encountered every kind of challenge/obstacle you can imagine since we started; too much heat, too little rain, irrigation pumps burning up, trellis breaks and repair, disease and Japanese beetles. Some are internal (idiot tax) and others external challenges. We are still new to this and you don't know what you don't know. Each variety of hops is different from the next. You can't just treat hops generically in the field and you certainly cannot do that in beer. Each variety has a different bitterness value and aroma, and each needs a different kind of love in the field.

What advice would I give to others interested in growing hops or other specialty crops in this area? I joke, “eat some chips and watch a movie instead”. Seriously, the one thing I would tell someone considering growing hops is to take lots of time learning from other growers what it is like. Take 12-24 months investigating and visiting other hop yards. Then talk to brewers about their willingness to buy “local” hops and how many pounds. Do lots of investigating and take your time before jumping in. There is no such thing as “dabbling with hops”. Getting into hops is a slog, you won't have a product to sell in the first year or maybe even two. Hops are hard to grow. Getting in touch with brewers can be challenging. It is like the wild west dominated by a couple big entities. Being unique in the hop market takes lots of experience and then 7-14 years if you get lucky. I will consult with you if it is something you are considering growing.

My goals for the coming 2018 season are to sell all my hops and finish a 5-acre expansion. I grow hops because of:

• The entrepreneurial opportunity to create value in a growing market
• The opportunity for innovation
• My lifelong passion for plants and the outdoors
• The desire to do something and own it
• The desire to be a maker
• My passion to be a hands-on steward of the environment
• My age and I really don’t need more than 3 hours of sleep a night anyway (kind of kidding)!
I am Shelley Postin and I reside in our little corner of Fulton County, in Avon, with my husband, Brett, and our two daughters, Kali and Olivia. I graduated from Avon High School (a few years ago) and continued my education and athletic career at Monmouth College. While there, I earned my elementary and special education degrees. I taught and coached at Avon Junior High and High School for 13 years before starting my career with COUNTRY Financial.

My husband, Brett, was born and raised on a farm just outside of Fairview where his family had a grain and livestock operation. After graduating from Valley High School, Brett earned his diesel mechanic degree from Rankin Tech in St Louis. He continued to work on the family farm while starting his career in auto repair at Avon Motor Sales. In 1991, he took a leap of faith and fulfilled the dream he had by starting his own business, Postin’s Pit Stop. That same year we got married. Both ventures are still going strong 26+ years later!

Our oldest daughter, Kali (19) graduated from Abingdon-Avon High School last spring and is currently a freshman at Carl Sandburg College. She is pursuing a degree in Anthropology in hopes of becoming a photo journalist. Kali’s goal is to speak for those who are unable to do so for themselves. She is an avid sports fan and enjoys time with her friends, family, and especially her dog, Loula.

Olivia (16) is a sophomore at Abingdon-Avon High School. She enjoys sports and spending time with her friends and family as well. She plays volleyball, basketball, and softball.

These days, our family time mostly centers around the girls and school activities. We are involved with the A-Town Athletic Boosters, Angels in Action Relay for Life team, and keep busy being involved with various community activities. We are extremely blessed to feel at home in three communities – Bushnell, Abingdon, and my hometown, Avon. We are members of St Bernard’s Catholic Church in Bushnell. Our girls grew up playing ball with the BPCA girls, and I coached for the BPCA volleyball teams when our schools cooped for sports. In recent years, the Abingdon community warmly welcomed us as we consolidated our schools five years ago.

I began my career with COUNTRY Financial in 2000. Though I grew up in a farming community, I was very much a “city girl” since I lived in town. By city, I am referring to the thriving metropolis of Avon. I had worked a couple summers at Tompkins State Bank, so I had a small idea of the financial end of farming, but still had much to learn about this business of insurance, as well as all of the facets of farming. Kali was an FFA officer in her chapter, and both girls were involved with the Avondale 4H Club. I gleaned an additional perspective of ag knowledge from their involvement in these organizations. COUNTRY Financial trained me for the business side, but I had yet to tackle the unknown territory of farm equipment, crop insurance, and all things Ag knowledge. Thankfully, farmers are a special group of people. I had many kind farming clients that helped this “city girl” through that learning curve. I still do not claim to know all things Ag, but I love my job and enjoy helping my clients.

My position with COUNTRY Financial puts me in a unique place to help people. In addition to property and life insurance coverage, we strive to be the best providers of financial security. We have many products and services that are available to our clients to help them protect what they have worked so hard to build. Farmers are hard workers and always plan carefully so they have the best chance of success, yet still have so many outside variables that can wreak havoc. Part of my job is to get to know and understand these risks and help eliminate the things that they cannot control. The educator in me takes a lot of pride in helping my people understand what is available to them and how they can best protect themselves. My dad used to tell his driver’s education students, “If you don’t want to know everything there is to know about insurance, then make sure you know and trust your insurance representative.” I pride myself in being that trusted advisor.
I’m Don Archdale from Lewistown, my wife Trinity and I own Big Horse Vineyards located just south of Lewistown.

I graduated from Lewistown High School and went on to obtain my associates degree in Electronic Technology from Hamilton Technical College in Davenport, Iowa. I have worked in the Industrial Electronic field for my career. Trinity graduated from Canton High School and went to school for Cosmetology. She owned a salon in Canton and now works full time at the vineyard as our Event and Sales Promoter. We are entrepreneurs at heart and now have devoted all of our passion and time into our agri-toursim business.

I grew up on the farm where we live and in fact we live in the house that I grew up in. My parents were small farmers. They raised corn, beans, hay, and livestock. The family love has always been raising and showing Draft Horses. We are keeping the family tradition alive and well. My parents and older brothers always raised Belgians. Now we also raise Belgians, but we have expanded into Clydesdales and Percherons, too. We have our own stallion and raise a few foals every year.

Horses are an expensive hobby/business to be in. They cost a lot to feed and maintain. Our farm was not large enough to make enough money to do the traditional row crops, so we looked into other types of agriculture ventures to go into. We always liked the atmosphere of vineyards and wineries. We decided to plant 100 grape vines to see if we could grow them on our type of soil and climate. We planted the hardy old-style grapes which are Concord, Niagara, Vignola’s, and Cayuga Whites that seemed to work for this area. They seemed to thrive, so we planted around 900 additional plants for a total of 1000 vines.

We then decided to build the winery buildings which includes a tasting room, cafe, gift shop, outdoor patio, and a banquet hall that will accommodate around 300 guests. We hold several different types of shows throughout the year and host around 20 weddings.

We are in the process of building our large-scale production facility to accommodate the demand for our wine. We specialize in sweet wines, but we also make semis and a few drys.

We are also in the process of building a small boutique hotel located in Lewistown where the old Cottonwood Motel was located. This will help us with our wedding side of the business and hopefully help in bringing outside guests to the Lewistown community.

We are currently selling our wines at HyVee grocery stores and plan on expanding into several other stores by the end of the year.

The family passion for our horses has become our marketing tool for the vineyard. They are also on display for guests to take a peek at while enjoying the scenic countryside views of the vineyard. We now have a second passion of growing grapes and processing them into fine wines.

My advice for anybody that is interested in starting a vineyard would be to get ready to spend a lot of money. It takes a lot more capital than I initially expected. We are lucky to have the help of our local banks and of our investors. We have surrounded ourselves with a good bunch of people that provide a lot of help to us. This business will require a lot of your time and passion, but it is very rewarding to see something that you grow turn into a product that other people can enjoy.
March 30

I'm Haley Ratcliff from Astoria, Illinois. I work on our family cattle operation, Black Gold Ranch and Feedlot in Vermont, Illinois. The ranch also includes both of my two sisters and both of my two brothers. That's me in the picture (on the left) and my sister Allyson on the right. My grandpa Steve Foglesong, started this ranch on reclaimed strip mine ground. My parents are Hannah and (step-dad) Nate Foglesong.

I am 20 years old and was homeschooled until I attended Spoon River College. I had originally planned to be a teacher, and was 3 years into an Elementary Education degree, when I realized that I wanted to work on the ranch. I had worked on the ranch ever since I was a kid and all through college. I always said I would never come back and ranch but after a few years of being away at college I realized ranching is what I truly love to do. Work takes up most of my time, but I was in 4-H when I was younger and showed cattle every summer. I attend the First Baptist Church in Colchester and like to be outdoors and spend time with my family.

The ranch has a feedlot confinement with capacity of 5000 animals. We also have a large cow/calf herd. Currently, there are about 5 full time employees. My day starts with feeding the cattle in the feedlot, while the other employees are feeding and bedding down the brood cows. This takes us all morning. Each pen of feeder calves in the confinement gets a specific mixture of feed and amount of feed each day. I have a computer program I use to calculate what the calves eat and keep them on track and gaining weight. The afternoon is spent vaccinating any new feeder cattle. There is normally a constant flow of new cattle coming in. It typically takes 180 days to feed out a feeder calf from start to finish. Once the calves are to the desired weight, we send them to Tyson Meats.

In the spring we are busy with calving, and then we work the ground and plant corn. We feed everything we grow to the cattle on our ranch. We don't harvest ear corn like the majority of farmers in Fulton County. All of our corn is either chopped for silage (which is fed to the brood cows) or fed as earlage to the cattle in the lot. This is then piled and covered and used to feed the cattle on the ranch all winter long. We harvest all our corn ourselves. During harvest my sister's and my job is to haul the silage (or earlage). My youngest sister, Josie, drives a tractor packing the silage pile down. When conditions are right, we can always haul manure! We spread the manure on our own fields to put natural nutrients back into the ground to grow a better crop. There's always fence to build and repair, vaccinations to give, and general ranch maintenance to be done all year round.

People don't realize that ranching has an impact on people, but I know that what I and other farmers and ranchers do does! We have to raise our animals, and plant and harvest our crops responsibly. We have regulations and programs to help us do our jobs better and improve the health of our animals. People don't realize how much ranchers and farmers do and that our lives revolve around our cows. We don't just go home from work at 5 o'clock! I love to see the corn and animals grow. I like seeing what my family has built. It's a good feeling to say, “we did this”!
My name is Alice Shelby. I came into this world in January 1927 on a farm in Fulton County to Frank and Leota Overcash.

When I was five, we moved to a different farm, where I learned to milk cows. Of course, I wasn’t active in milking until I was nine or so. If Dad and my brother were working late in the field, I would get the cows in and milk them. I also hauled and dumped corn for Dad.

We farmed mostly with horses, and I did work them some. The farmers would rake the corn stalks into rows, then burn them in the evenings. It was so pretty to see the fall burning of stalks over the country. Now farmers leave the stalks in the field to conserve soil and nutrients.

I attended a country school (Sunnyside) and graduated in 1944 from Fairview Community High School. I worked as a secretary at Graham Hospital for a short time. I had hours that lasted until 11pm. While still playing in the summer school band, the manager from Fairview Farmer’s Elevator came to hire me as a bookkeeper there. I was there for five years, then married a farm boy, Kenneth Shelby, in 1949.

At the time we were married Kenneth was in the military. He was sent to the state of Washington, where I soon followed. When he was released we came back home to farm with his Dad. But he was soon called back to the service a few months later. We spent the next few months in Kansas. Our first son was born while we were there.

We were full-time farmers after getting out of the army. We raised crops, hogs, and cattle. I ground feed and hauled it, along with water to the hogs in the field.

We had three sons; Dale (Debbie), Gary (Marjie), and David (Joyce). They all farm together and each has two sons. Of my six grandsons, five are farming or in farm-related jobs, and one is a nurse. I have fourteen living great-grandchildren.

I raised chickens, sold eggs, butchered chickens, gardened and canned like most farm wives at the time. My husband and I were county 4-H leaders for 13 years. I was the “little one’s” Sunday School teacher for nearly 20 years at the Maples Mills United Methodist Church, where I now play the organ and am co-treasurer.

Years ago, I moldboard-plowed, but chisel plow now or run the vertical tiller tool if needed. When the guidance system came out I just KNEW I didn’t need it, but I was sold on it the first round! My husband used to say, “I have to let her plow, or she gets mad at me”. I’m hoping I can chisel plow this fall, too, as I dearly love it.

Farming has always been a part of my life. I can’t imagine living in a city with all that traffic noise, or not being able to see the beautiful sunrise and sunsets. I’m so grateful for the many blessings the Lord has given me.
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